

VZCZCXRO1554
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHLC #0288/01 1681825
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 171825Z JUN 09 ZDK CORRECTING TEXT IN PARAGRAPH TWO ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1236
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000288

C O R R E C T E D COPY - correcting text in paragraph two

SIPDIS

AF/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/17/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: GABON: DYNAMICS OF OMAR BONGO'S FUNERAL

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 00246
[1](#)B. LIBREVILLE 00271

LIBREVILLE 00000288 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: PolOff Christopher Gunning for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) President Omar Bongo's funeral was a solemn event marked by the presence of fourteen African heads of state and French President Sarkozy. In separate meetings with Interim President Rose Rogombe and Defense Minister Ali Bongo, the U.S. Presidential delegation emphasized the importance of following the constitutional process for choosing Gabon's next president and reaffirmed the support of the U.S. during the transition period that lies ahead. While committing to adhere to Gabon's constitution, both Ali Bongo and Rogombe noted that the constitutionally-mandated 45 day period required to organize an election is too short. Neither offered a timeframe for a possible extension, but Ali Bongo stressed that it should not be too long. Rogombe has requested a timetable for the election from the Prime Minister and expects that the Constitutional Court will play a prominent role in a decision on an extension. End Summary.

Gabon Leaders & Committed to the Constitution8

[1](#)2. (C) During former President Omar Bongo's funeral proceedings on June 16 the U.S. Presidential Delegation, led by the Ambassador, had the opportunity for brief private, side-meetings with Interim President Rose Rogombe and Ali Ben Bongo, the Minister of Defense and eldest son of the former president. The Ambassador, State AF PDAS Phillip Carter and Michael Strautmanis, White House Chief of Staff to the Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Relations, emphasized to each of the Gabonese leaders the importance of the constitutional process in determining Gabon's next president and the friendly relationship the U.S. is committed to maintaining with Gabon. Both Rogombe and Ali Bongo expressed appreciation for the U.S. message and stressed their commitment to the Gabonese constitution and the democratic process. Also present in the Presidential Delegation were Ms. Ertharin Cousin and Dr. Howard Wolpe.

Election Timetable Rethought?

[1](#)3. (C) Both Ali Bongo and Rogombe noted that the constitutionally-mandated 45 day period to organize a presidential election is too short. Each suggested that an

extension might be necessary to allow for the 30 day mourning period that began with Bongo's death on June 8. Although he was careful not to mention a specific timeframe, Ali Bongo was firm that the possible extension of the 45-day period should not be too long. Rogombe pointed out that there were still unresolved issues from previous elections, including voters lists and the use of biometrics. She noted that the force majeure clause in the constitution allows for natural disasters, war, major civil unrest, and social disorder to delay an election, adding that the Constitutional Court would play a prominent role in considering a request to extend the 45 day deadline to organize an election. The Prime Minister was preparing a timetable for the President that would clarify what factors would need to be considered and the amount of time required to carry out the election.

Funeral Dynamics

14. (C) Three eulogies were made during the ceremony. Ali Ben Bongo's speech noting his father's accomplishments seemed to hit the right notes of solemn reverence and respect and resonated well with our Gabonese contacts. Rogombe's eulogy was brief and perfunctory. Prime Minister Jean Eyeghe Ndong's eulogy was respectful of the deceased President, but subtly critical of the rest of the Gabonese government and the French. His speech created a considerable buzz on the streets of Libreville the following day.

15. (U) Fourteen active African heads of state attended the funeral -- France, Benin, Burkina Faso, Republic of Congo, Dem. Republic of Congo, Senegal, Mali, Chad, Burundi, Togo, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe. Many former heads of state who collaborated with President Bongo on peace initiatives were also present, as were business leaders. Reconciliation marked the solemn atmosphere; there was a notable moment when

LIBREVILLE 00000288 002.2 OF 002

current Malian President Toure gestured to former President Konare as he paid his respects to Bongo. Konare joined Toure to lay the wreath at the foot of the casket. French President Sarkozy made a similarly fraternal gesture to former President Jacques Chirac when it was his turn to lay a wreath.

16. (U) The ceremony lasted several hours and was followed by a military parade cut short to hasten the departure of the remains and family before dark to Bongo's home province of Haut Ogooue. The crowds along the parade and funeral cortege route were orderly and subdued. The car bearing the remains was cheered as it passed by the crowds. Sarkozy was repeatedly greeted by jeers from the crowd, while Chirac was generally very well-received.

Comment

17. (C) Bongo's funeral provided an enlightening glimpse of Gabon's leadership and Bongo family dynamics. President Rogombe appeared tired with the full weight of the transition on her shoulders. During the U.S. delegation's encounter with her, Rogombe only brightened when she raised with the Ambassador her interest in discussing social issues with the Ambassador after she leaves the Presidency. The feuding within Bongo's family appeared to be resolved or least the differences between Ali Bongo, sister Pascaline, and other family members temporarily set aside for the ceremony. Although Ali gave the eulogy on behalf of the family, Pascaline was equally involved in managing the large number of family members present. Less evident was the maneuvering between the potential contenders for the presidency. With the funeral marking the end of the Omar Bongo era, the direction of Gabon's political future should become clearer,

particularly regarding the transitionn period and the
election process.
REDDICK